



Winter 2006 In this Issue

- A Rancher's "Beginnings" ... 2
- New PMC Farm ... 3
- People Profile: "Columbia to NRCS Engineer" ... 4
- I want to be Outstanding ... 4
- Snapshots from the Field ... 5

Quotable Quotes

"When I was young I was called a rugged individualist. When I was in my fifties I was considered eccentric. Here I am doing and saying the same things I did then and I'm labeled senile."

-George Burns

"Patience is the ability to let your light shine after your fuse is blown."

-Unknown

"Enjoy yourself. These are the 'good old days' you're going to miss in the years ahead." -Unknown

Highlights



The newsletter for Idaho NRCS employees and conservation partners.

Special Feature

Idaho Conservation Success Stories Abound

Travel rural Idaho and you'll be hard-pressed to find even the smallest of valleys untouched by conservation.

Farmers and ranchers from Bonners Ferry to Twin Falls, Salmon to Marsing are putting conservation on their land. NRCS, SWCDs, and voluntary conservation programs are responsible for much of the success.

"All across Idaho, NRCS employees have left their conservation signature on the landscape," says State Conservationist **Richard Sims**. "When I travel the state and see all our good work, I am incredibly proud to be a part of it."

Examples of the successes include:

- **Fort Hall:** The **Shoshone Bannock Tribe** is working with NRCS and WHIP to create wildlife habitat among hundreds of acres of cropland.
- **Burley:** **M&H Farms** planted 16 miles of trees and started strip-cropping through EQIP to reduce blowing dust and snow, and help make I-84 safer.
- **Filer:** **Roger Stutzman** utilized the energy conservation provision in EQIP to build a gravity pressurized pipeline.
- **Whitebird:** EQIP is helping several landowners battle yellow starthistle.
- **Bonners Ferry:** 1200 acres of wetland habitat now exist thanks to a local working group, NRCS and WRP.

With such success, you'd think the job is about done, but with new resource issues cropping up, nothing could be farther from true.

"With a growing population, we're going to see newer resource concerns, such as air quality," Sims says.

Helping Producers Across Idaho



Les and Lavada Louck, Marsing, developed a nutrient management plan for their cattle operation, and converted to pressurized irrigation on their cropland with the help of NRCS and EQIP.



The **Herbst Family**, Salmon, use best management practices on their cattle operation. They enrolled in CSP to help ensure the future viability of the ranch.



Verl and Shirl Arnold, retired ranchers near St. Anthony, enrolled their land into GRP to protect it from development. (Pictured with **Ken Beckmann, DC.**)

Helping People
Help the Land



9173 W. Barnes Drive, Ste C
Boise, ID 83709
www.id.nrcs.usda.gov



NRCS Assisting Beginning Rancher

by Kristen Clayton
Public Affairs, Idaho Falls

Frank Scarborough is trying his hand at ranching. The Houston native and wife, Judy, visited southeastern Idaho, fell in love with it and purchased land.

"Shh," he says. "This is the best kept secret. This land is accessible, yet has the remoteness I was looking for in getting away from the city."



New rancher Frank Scarborough looks over a streambank restoration project on his property.

The Scarborougs found land in a small valley along the Blackfoot River northeast of Soda Springs. They plan to work the land as well as fish and hunt.

Soaking up new information about managing cattle, Scarborough turned to NRCS for assistance. He had lots of questions when he found the Soda Springs office, says DC **Larry Mickelsen**.

Overgrazing, weeds and a deeply eroding streambank were just some of the problems he hoped to repair.

"In this particular case the Scarborougs fell into the beginner farmer status, where the landowner has less than ten years of experience in farming or ranching," Mickelsen

says. "Through EQIP, Frank was able to get a higher percent cost share."

It's an incentive that helps get the "newbie" going at a time when the small farmer seems to be a fading commodity.

"The cost share was attractive. That was important for me. There's no way I have the resources, both knowledge and money, to do what I wanted to do without Larry and NRCS," Scarborough says.

Mickelsen has found that new farmers and ranchers want to do what's right for their land, but may not know how to fix concerns such as excessive runoff, forage quality, inefficient water use, habitat fragmentation and others. Some know how to fix their resource concerns, but don't have the finances to do it. And others may not have the time or experience.

The Soda Springs office helped three beginning farmers in 2005.

For beginners, filling out paperwork can be a bit overwhelming. However, Scarborough found the process to be pretty straight forward, and he looks forward to working with NRCS again.

"There are all kinds of opportunities and there are other things Larry and I want to talk about down the road. I guess I'm trying to do one thing at a time."

Have you nominated a colleague for a NRCS Spot Award today? You can nominate your peers or employees you supervise any time throughout the year.

North Idaho Landowners Defend Against Erosion

by Sarah Bigger
Public Affairs, North Idaho

Each year, 125 dump truck loads of sediment erode from the banks of the Pack River. With the help of NRCS, landowners along the river are beginning to fight back.

Extending 40 miles, the Pack River is the second largest tributary to Lake Pend Oreille. It is considered impaired for water quality due to excessive sediments and nutrients.

Meschke Property

Marie Meschke's property sits on a river meander and drops ten feet down a steep slope to the river. Until 2000 and EQIP, the river claimed five to six feet of her property annually and had begun to threaten her home.

Sandpoint NRCS used a gravel filter, geotextile fabric, angular toe rock and bundles of willows to stabilize the hillside.

"If we hadn't done this, the river would have encroached on our house," Meschke says.

Hurley-Anderson Property

It's taken two tries to find a solution to riverbank sloughing for George Hurley and Linda Anderson.

First, three barbs were installed in the river to deflect and slow the current. It helped but the problem wasn't solved. The landowners collaborated with Sandpoint NRCS for another solution.

The result combined a taper bank, rocks and willow bundles along 1000 feet of streambank.

"At this point, we're 100 percent positive about this," Hurley says. "We feel fortunate to have the interest of NRCS people who know about these things."



South Bingham SCD Purchases Farm for Plant Materials Research

by Loren St. John
Aberdeen Plant Materials Center

The South Bingham SCD recently purchased the "Slaugh" Farm north of Aberdeen to expand plant testing research by the NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC). The SCD also installed a new irrigation system on the farm to meet the increasing need for plant research and seed production.

Since 1939, the PMC has tested plants and new conservation technology in real-world situations and found solutions for a large variety of natural resource challenges in the Intermountain West. The SCD has been an important partner in those efforts. In 1955, the SCD purchased the "Home Farm" located two miles north of Aberdeen where the PMC's field operations are centered.

The additional farm ground will allow the PMC to expand. Research priorities include developing perfor-

mance-tested range, pasture and forestland grasses, forbs and shrubs, and developing and disseminating streambank bioengineering techniques for riparian areas and wetlands.

The new irrigation system was installed late last fall. Additional future improvements include windbreaks and graveled roads. The PMC will begin establishing research and seed production fields at the new property this spring.



Research field at the Aberdeen PMC.

Idaho 9th in Nation for Performance Bonuses

NRCS Chief Bruce Knight recently announced that \$56.8 million in conservation program funding is being provided to 41 states for their high levels of participation and performance.

Of the 41 states, Idaho ranked 9th in performance incentive funding and received an extra \$2 million. According to Bob Bartholomew, NRCS assistant state conservationist for programs, the money is being rolled into 2006 EQIP operations and contracts.

The performance incentives are awarded to states achieving a high level of program efficiency and optimizing environmental benefits.

Round Robin Update!

NRCS news flashes from around the state:

- SO Tech Services is holding a focus group meeting 1/30-31 to streamline the conservation planning documentation. The focus group is made up of field, area and state office staff.
- Tech Services also has begun an initiative to complete Rapid Watershed Assessments (RWAs) for Idaho's 84 HUCs. Three are now completed and ten are scheduled to be finished by the end of FY06. Field offices and SWCDs can utilize the RWAs to prioritize future workload.
- USDA announced the 2006 CSP sign-up for Feb. 13 - March 31. In Idaho, the Clearwater and the Lower Bear River - Malad watersheds are eligible.
- The "Stockmanship" book written by Steve Cote, Arco DC, has been selected to be included in the National Ag Library Collection.
- Celebrate the new NRCS slogan, "Helping People Help the Land" to be used on promotional materials and the website.

Stream Workshop Helps Local Rancher

The Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project recently organized a streambank bioengineering workshop on rancher Garry Merri's land with the help of the Lemhi SWCD, NRCS and the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission. Over 30 people attended and Chris Hoag, Aberdeen PMC, served as one of the instructors.



By workshop end, Merri's streambank was covered with willows, brush layers and vegetative clumps. Wetland sod mats were taking hold in the streambank and the once vulnerable ground was protected.



People Profile: Positive Attitude Brought Engineer to Idaho NRCS

by Kristen Clayton
Public Affairs, Idaho Falls

A positive attitude is responsible for getting **Martha Nunez-Haius** from Columbia to Pocatello.

"I always have a good attitude," she says. "Life is too short."

Raised by a single mother, Martha grew up with 10 siblings in Columbia. She spent five years applying to come to the U.S. in search of opportunity. In 1986, she arrived and used her only skill at the time, seamstress-ing, to get by. Then, in 1992, she was in a horrible car accident that changed her life. She overcame broken bones and near paralysis with a new attitude she describes as an epiphany, "now I can do whatever I want with my life."

After raising three children and, with her first marriage ending, she decided to go to college at the same



Martha Nunez-Haius with Bob Lehman.

time as her oldest son. She liked math and made it her goal to attend ISU in Civil Engineering, and received an Associates Degree.

Her boyfriend (now husband) encouraged her to continue on for a Bachelors Degree. In 2002, she completed school and is now considered one of the state's finest engineers, according to **Bob Lehman**, NRCS

engineer in Rexburg.

"Martha has helped me tremendously on the computer," he says.

Meanwhile, Martha says, "Bob has helped me learn the NRCS way of life in engineering."

Having a good attitude around the office is not always easy, but for Martha it comes naturally as she turns difficult things into fun. "English is hard. Everything is put backwards."

So, Martha and the Pocatello office have turned language into a game. Phrases that play on words such as "pulling my leg" and "getting the goose bumps" are thrown out by her coworkers. Martha enjoys trying to figure them out and making up a few of her own.

"She makes me laugh" says **Christine Waite**, soil conservationist.

Excerpt from: I Want to be Outstanding! *Tips for the EO/CR Performance Element*

by Bob Bartholomew
Asst. STC for Programs, Boise

This January brought NRCS a revised performance appraisal format.

Most performance elements are clear to understand and relate directly to your day-to-day duties. However, the EO/CR element sometimes baffles folks on how to be "Outstanding."

The EO/CR statement for non-supervisory staff begins, "Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior... Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Performs duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness..."

So, how can you be outstanding? Will a good smile and attitude be enough? Not likely.

Remember, a single action, unless pretty monumental, generally isn't enough to get an Outstanding rating. Here are a few ideas of how to work toward becoming an EO/CR superstar:

- Organize an event in your office that highlights a specific group. You could invite a speaker, speak to a specific group about NRCS hiring opportunities or develop an outreach plan for an underserved group.
- Apply for a position on the EO/CR committee.
- Submit articles to our PAS on an EEO/CR subject for inclusion in Highlights.

Remember, NRCS expects employees will offer services to all individuals without discrimination. That's Fully Successful. To be Outstanding, you need to achieve beyond, and that takes extra effort and commitment.

Finally, document your accomplishments and bring a detailed list to your appraisal review.

(See Bob's full article on our **Idaho NRCS website**, under "Idaho NRCS Employees" on the right side and then under "Civil Rights.")

Civil Rights Awards



Patrick Evans, Rupert DC and NRCS Idaho Civil Rights Committee chair, awards Patti Hurley, Twin Falls technician, and Pete Sinclair, Marsing DC, for their hard work on the committee





Snapshots from the Field



This moose and her two followers were sighted on a WHIP project outside Coeur d'Alene.



The Owyhee SCD supervisors at their recent annual banquet in Marsing with new administrative assistant Gena Millard.

Ecologist Provides Training in Afghanistan



Compass training. Chris Hoag, wetland plant ecologist at the Aberdeen PMC, traveled to Afghanistan to conduct a five-day training session on watershed planning. Here, Hoag integrates the use of a compass with conservation planning.



Still working on rivers. Afghanistan faces many of the same water quality and streambank erosion problems as in the U.S. Hoag helped teach 36 "practitioners" selected by the Afghan Forest and Range Department. The training included in-class lecture, demonstrations and field exercises.

Rough duty at the NRCS Snow Survey School! John Wirt, hydrologic technician, Jeff Anderson, hydrologist, and Mary Bodley, Orofino Soil Con. (far right), prepare for a training trek. The school, held near Bend, Ore., includes a week-long curriculum of snow sampling and survival training.



Welcome to new Rigby soil conservation technician, Mary Jennings (below). Mary comes to NRCS after 17 years with the Custer and Jefferson SWCDs. Howard Johnson, DC, (right) is thrilled to have her expertise in the office.





Snapshots from the Field

Richard Sims, state conservationist, speaks at the Idaho RC&D Association meeting held in Post Falls.



(Above): Check out that root! Idaho Falls range specialist Don Edgerton (left) holds a complete mule's ear plant--tap root included--found along an eroded streambank by soil scientist Bill Hiatt (right).



(Left): The Council School District, U.S. Forest Service, West Central Highlands RC&D and the Southwest Idaho RC&D attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the "Fuel to Schools" program which uses slash piles to heat schools.

Did You Know...

- Five tons of topsoil spread over an acre is 5 mm.
- 35 percent of America's topsoil is still at risk of erosion.
- Soils come in a rainbow of colors.
- Earth is the only planet with soil.
- One cup of soil can hold 6 billion organisms.
- It takes 200 to 1,000 years to make an inch of topsoil.
- It takes 25-120 gallons of water to produce one pound of plant material.



Personnel Actions Oct. - Dec. 2005

NEW HIRES

Jeffrey J Anderson – Hydrologist, Boise SO, 11/27/2005
John P Wirt – Hydrologic Tech., Boise SO, 12/11/2005
Duane E Pearson – Soil Con. Tech., Emmett, 09/18/2005
Mary Jennings – Soil Con Tech., Rigby 12/25/2005

EXCEPTED APPOINTMENT

Darin W Vrem – Archeologist – Boise SO, 11/21/2005

PROMOTIONS

Peter D Sinclair – Career Ladder Promotion, DC– Marsing, 11/27/2005
Charles T Bair – Career Ladder Promotion, Bio. Science Tech. (Plants) – Aberdeen PMC, 12/25/2005

Thomas M Newnham – Career Ladder Promotion, Soil Con Tech. – Shoshone, 12/25/2005

REASSIGNMENTS

Pamela L Scheinost – Soil Con., from Caldwell to Nezperce, 12/11/2005

RETIREMENTS

Mariann Whitworth – Budget Officer – Boise SO, 10/31/2005

SEPARATIONS

Kenneth G Preston – Soil Con – Moscow, 12/09/2005

MISCELLANEOUS

Diane Leone – Transfer, DC, Moscow, to South Carolina, 11/13/2005

James Montesi – Transfer, Hydrologist, SO, to Alaska

Steven E Ray – Transfer, Soil Con., Driggs to Oklahoma, 11/13/2005

Mark D Olson – Return to Duty, DC, Salmon, 12/04/2005